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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Manitoba | 39e | 2e | Discours sur le Budget | 9 avril 2008 | Gregory F. Selinger | Ministre des Finances | New Democratic Party of Manitoba |

Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my honour to present Budget '08, our government’s ninth consecutive balanced budget.

      Le Manitoba connaît aujourd’hui plus de succès qu’il n’en a connus depuis des décennies.

***Translation***

*Manitoba is a province that is enjoying more success today than it has in decades.*

***English***

Eight years of solid economic growth, strategic public investments and prudent fiscal management have combined to produce greater prosperity for Manitobans and their families.

The foundation of our economy is rock solid: our population is growing, industries are profitable, unemployment remains low, and our cost of living continues to be affordable. More young people are going to college and university, and a growing number are choosing to put down roots here.

La solidité de notre économie témoigne des contributions de chaque Manitobain et Manitobaine.

***Translation***

*The strength of our economy is a tribute to every Manitoban.*

***English***

Each and every day, our government is working with Manitobans, helping to build a strong economy by putting people first and managing our resources responsibly.

Our government invests in Manitobans’ priorities: health care, education, infrastructure, public safety, and environmental protection. For eight years, we have invested wisely, managed the public debt, reduced taxes, and encouraged growth in the economy. Budget '08 continues this balanced approach, building upon our successes and preparing our province for the future.

We are preparing for the future because there are challenges ahead of us. The competition for skilled labour is fierce, the high dollar challenges our export industries, and the slowdown in the U.S. economy threatens to limit growth around the world.

These global economic threats are real. But Manitoba is well-positioned to meet these challenges head-on.

Mr. Speaker, our diverse economy, our enterprising business community, our hard-working and highly talented workforce, and our government’s sound economic strategies will ensure that we meet these challenges.

The strength of our economy in 2007 is reflected in the statistics:

·         The economy grew by 3 percent overall in '07, outpacing Canada for the second consecutive year;

·         Population increase was the highest in 25 years driven by exceptional levels of immigration and the best interprovincial migration numbers in almost a quarter century;

·         Employment grew by 1.6 percent as the employment rate and the labour force participation rate reached all-time highs;

·         Housing starts were up by 14 percent;

·         Retail sales rose 9.5 percent, second-highest in Canada;

·         Farm receipts increased 18 percent, almost double the national growth;

·         Private investment grew by 9.5 percent and Manitoba will lead the country with a 22 percent jump in 2008;

·         Foreign exports increased 13 percent, even as national exports increased by only 2 percent, with strong gains to all major markets.

The development of clean, renewable energy continues to be a central part of our long-term vision to build the economy. Electricity exports are forecast to produce $5.5 billion in revenues over the next 10 years.

While growth may slow due to changing conditions in the Canadian and world economies, Mr. Speaker, our economy is still predicted to grow by 2.7 percent in real terms in '08, well above the 1.9 percent predicted for Canada.

In the face of more uncertain economic times ahead, our government’s strategy will be to focus on maintaining the gains we have made, holding steady to the same course that has served Manitobans so well.

Today’s budget will support our province as it continues to grow and prepare for the future.

The budget reflects our commitments to move forward on:

·         Delivering quality health care and promoting healthy living;

·         Promoting a cleaner, healthier environment;

·         Implementing new education and training opportunities for young people here and at home;

·         Providing safer communities;

·         Keeping Manitoba affordable;

·         Developing our clean energy advantage for the benefit of all Manitobans; and

·         Building our economy while building our communities.

**Education**

Post-secondary education equips our young people to seize the opportunities our growing economy offers.

Our strategy to ensure post-secondary education will meet the demands of the future rests on three pillars: affordability, accessibility, and excellence.

      Monsieur le Président, le Manitoba est l’endroit où le coût des études est le plus abordable au Canada.

***Translation***

*Mr. Speaker, Manitoba is the most affordable place to get an education in Canada.*

***English***

These education policies are delivering results:

·         Enrolments are up by one-third since '99;

·        Student debt is down by 26 percent; and

·         Manitoba has now the lowest student debt levels outside of Quebec.

Tuition fees as high as 80 percent within three years have been seen in other jurisdictions where tuition freezes have been eliminated.

Mr. Speaker, our government will not let that happen. Today’s budget extends the 10 percent tuition reduction for one more year and provides offsetting funding increases to the universities and colleges. Beginning September '09 there will be a gradual increase in tuition fees back to the '99 level.

Starting next year, we will also begin to raise student financial assistance by $8 million over the coming years to ensure that post-secondary education remains affordable. Programs specifically aimed at improving affordability for rural and northern students will be included.

Today’s budget further improves affordability by reducing the interest charged on student loans by 1 percent.

To encourage graduates to put down roots and start their careers in Manitoba, we now offer the most attractive tax environment for new graduates in all of Canada.The new Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate returns 60 percent of eligible tuition fees up to a maximum of $25,000.

The second pillar of our strategy is about improving accessibility to increase the number of students who are able to successfully pursue post‑secondary education. Budget '08 promotes accessibility by adding $1 million to improve high school graduation rates and support students in transitioning to post-secondary education; and providing additional resources to enhance accessibility and completion of post-secondary education by under-represented groups.

      Le troisième pilier est l’investissement dans l’excellence.

***Translation***

*The third pillar is investing in excellence.*

***English***

Just two years ago, we committed to the largest-ever increase in post-secondary funding with a three-year, $60 million commitment.

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget surpasses that commitment. We are maintaining our commitment to increase operating funding by 5 percent, and we are adding another $8.4 million on top of that. That gives the colleges and universities as much new money as they would have gained from a 6 percent increase in tuition fees.

Manitoba has supported post-secondary education capital projects totalling more than $400 million since 1999, and Budget '08 commits more than $100 million over the next two years for new and planned capital projects.

Mr. Speaker, this year we are pleased to begin supporting the University of Manitoba’s Project Domino, a $100 million multi-year project which will see the construction of a new student residence and the renewal of several other buildings on campus.

Our government has exceeded our commitment to fund public schools at the rate of economic growth. This year’s increase of $53.5 million is the largest single-year increase in more than 25 years.

Our government has a specific plan to reduce the burden of education taxes on property while increasing our share of funding for public education. We are moving toward funding 80 percent of the total cost of public education. Since '99, we have eliminated the Residential Education Support Levy entirely, cut farmland school taxes, and more than doubled the Education Property Tax Credit.

Manitoba’s Aboriginal population is of great importance to our economic future and education is critical for Aboriginal economic success. Investments in Aboriginal education and training are delivering positive results: university and college enrolments are up and apprenticeship registrations have more than tripled since 1999.

We are encouraged by recent discussions with the federal government to address the gap in education investments and programming. As a province, we are committed to working with every First Nation community and the federal government to build quality programs from early years through to high school graduation.

Manitoba introduced a four-year Bachelor of Aboriginal Midwifery program at the University College of the North. This program will increase the availability of midwives in Aboriginal communities, ensuring culturally and medically appropriate care for mothers and their newborns in their home communities.

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget follows through on our commitment to support Aboriginal students entering the medical profession, beginning with a new program that will provide bursaries of $7,000 annually to Aboriginal medical students.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 also continues to move forward with an additional investment for Red River Community College to create a new Interlake campus for Peguis and Fisher River.

**Skills Strategy**

Last year, our growing economy created 9,500 new jobs.

Manitoba’s Provincial Nominee Program is bringing skilled workers and entrepreneurs from around the world to our province. Manitoba welcomed almost 11,000 new immigrants last year –the highest immigration rate in 50 years.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08 provides an additional $1.2 million for immigrant settlement and language training services to facilitate the integration of new immigrants into our communities.

      Depuis son entrée en fonction, notre gouvernement a plus que doublé le financement annuel alloué aux programmes d’apprentissage et d’alphabétisation des adultes au Manitoba.

***Translation***

*Since taking office, our government has more than doubled annual funding for Manitoba's adult learning and literacy programs.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget brings our total investment to $19.3 million annually for literacy programs.

Our government is committed to creating 4,000 new apprenticeship training spaces over four years. Today’s budget provides additional funding to fulfil that commitment.

I am pleased to report that my colleague, the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Rondeau), will soon be announcing a new agreement that will provide $18 million for training, employment support, and skills upgrading in partnership with the federal government.

**Supporting Innovation**

The pace of innovation has increased rapidly with the expanding global marketplace. The Premier’s (Mr. Doer) Economic Advisory Council has strongly advocated for greater investment in research and innovation: investments that enable productivity increases, resource conservation, and a higher standard of living. We have also taken action to support innovation including:

·         Increasing investment in research and development by 87 percent since '99;

·         Supporting the development of commer­cialization centres; and

·         Introducing tax measures to improve competitiveness and spur investments in productivity.

The Advanced Manufacturing Initiative helps Manitoba companies adopt innovative practices that reduce waste and increase productivity in the workplace.

Manitoba business leaders have called for an increased emphasis on innovation to maintain Manitoba’s competitive position. A new Manitoba Innovation Council made up of business, research and community leaders will be created to guide a revitalized focus on innovation and commer­cialization.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08 completes our commitment to increase funding for the Manitoba Health Research Council to $6 million to support health research.

The Premier’s Economic Advisory Council also recommended improving competitiveness by reducing red tape and moving toward single-window service delivery for business. We have taken action on that advice by redesigning the Manitoba Business Portal to provide real single-window, one-stop access to business information and transactions over the internet.

**Infrastructure**

Our province’s extensive network and highways and railways, coupled with our international airport and deepwater seaport in Churchill, represent a significant competitive advantage for Manitoba business.

The 1990s left Manitoba with a legacy of aging roads and bridges in need of repair and replacement. Our government is taking action**.**

      Il y a deux ans, nous avons annoncé un programme sans précédent de quatre milliards de dollars sur dix ans visant l’amélioration des routes et des ponts dans toute la province.

***Translation***

*Two years ago, we announced an unprecedented $4 billion, 10-year program to modernize highways and bridges across the province.*

***English***

The first five-year phase is underway with investments in key routes including the Trans-Canada Highway, the Perimeter Highway, and Highways 75, 6, 10, 16, and 59.

In all, Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 provides $15 million as the first instalment of a total of $125 million in new investment to increase inspections, maintenance, and rehabilitation of provincial bridges.

The Red River Floodway expansion began two and a half years ago with the support of the federal government and is nearing completion. When the work is completed, it will provide 1-in-700 year level of flood protection, protecting Manitobans from more than $12 billion in potential damages in the event of a major flood.

We are also making significant investments in water and waste-water infrastructure. Manitoba is providing one-third of the funding for upgrading Winnipeg’s waste-water treatment plants. Working in partnership, we will invest $150 million for rural and northern municipal water and waste-water projects. With federal and municipal government support, investments in Manitoba water protection will total over $1 billion in the coming years.

Budget '08 contains important funding for clean drinking water projects including Grandview, Grosse Isle and Melita and for waste-water improvements for many communities such as The Pas and Roblin. As well, we are continuing to make upgrades to provincially owned waste-water facilities in provincial parks across the province, including Birds Hill, Big Whiteshell, and West Hawk Lake.

Today’s budget also builds on our increased investments to upgrade water and waste-water systems in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs communities. Annual capital spending has now more than tripled since '99 and important investments will be made this year in communities like Thicket Portage, Wabowden, and Waterhen.

**Water Protection**

In Manitoba, we know the goals of protecting the environment and growing the economy can be achieved simultaneously.

Based on the work of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board, our government introduced a major new strategy focussed on reducing nitrogen and phosphorus levels in our waterways. We have taken action on over 90 percent of the board’s recommendations already, and we are continuing to move forward by engaging all those who contribute to the problem to become part of the solution. Mr. Speaker, since '99, we have committed more than $190 million for water protection.

La protection des ressources hydriques est la responsabilité de tous.

***Translation***

*Water protection is everyone's responsibility.*

***English***

We were the first province to introduce legislation to regulate phosphorus in automatic dishwasher detergents, and we are pleased that our efforts succeeded in triggering a national response.

By January 1, '09, we will also restrict phosphorus application for lawn and garden fertilizers. We have introduced new standards to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus released by large waste-water treatment facilities and will be introducing limits for smaller water systems and lagoons. We are also helping municipalities meet the new standards by sharing in the costs.

New rules will be announced this year prohibiting the use of septic fields in certain areas and bringing in new restrictions for current systems. Budget '08 also provides new resources for enhanced monitoring and inspection of septic systems.

Our government has introduced nutrient restrictions for the livestock industry to provide for environmentally sustainable growth. Following the Clean Environment Commission (CEC) review, we have placed a moratorium on hog industry expansion in parts of the province and will be strengthening regulations to protect sensitive and marginal lands in Manitoba.

Further restrictions on the spreading of manure during the winter have been accepted as recommended by the CEC. Restrictions will also apply to municipal sludge, and to fertilizers for lawns and golf courses.

Wetlands help to purify the water, mitigate flooding and reduce greenhouse gases. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08:

·         increases funding for Conservation Districts to more than $5.3 million;

·         increases our contribution to the Nature Conservancy of Canada to $400,000 as part of a five-year, $1.5 million funding agreement;

·         continues funding for the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation; and

·         renews the five-year funding agreement for Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre with increases which will be matched by Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that today’s budget introduces a new water conservation program that will encourage the purchase of water-saving appliances and devices.

**Climate Change**

Manitoba has a strong record of achievement in fighting climate change. We were the first in Canada to take action and we will be the first to demonstrate solid results.

In the days ahead, our government will be announcing our comprehensive multi-year funding plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which will include action on sustainable farm practices, trucking technologies, active transport initiatives, green heating technologies, and much more.

Mr. Speaker, our actions to date along with the new measures we will be announcing put us on track to have a carbon-neutral decade: no increase in emissions from 2000 to 2010, and we will become the first jurisdiction in Canada to meet a legislated Kyoto target by 2012.

Manitoba relies less on fossil fuels than much of North America, with 98 percent of the electricity generated coming from clean, renewable, water power.

Our government is developing our province’s hydro-electric resources to their full potential for the benefit of Manitobans. Construction of the Wuskwatim dam in partnership with the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is underway now and development work continues on Conawapa.

      Les investissements que nous avons effectués ces dernières années donnent d’excellents résultats.

***Translation***

*The investments of past years are producing excellent returns.*

***English***

Electricity exports bring hundreds of millions of dollars to Manitoba annually, and Hydro’s debt equity ratio has improved from 86 percent 10 years ago to 78 percent today.

Other initiatives to promote the development of clean energy resources include:

·         developing 1,000 MW of wind energy;

·         creating a community wind power fund for monitoring towers;

·         introducing the ethanol blended fuel mandate; and

·         establishing a 5 percent mandate for biodiesel by 2010.

Through its Power Smart program, Manitoba Hydro is promoting energy efficiency through innovative programs such as energy audits, on-bill financing for retrofits and geothermal systems and promotion of energy-efficient appliances.

This year our government will work with Manitoba Hydro and community groups to assist an estimated 1,200 households with low incomes take advantage of energy efficient opportunities.

**Healthy Manitobans**

Improving health care for Manitobans remains one of our top priorities.

      La Province a investi des sommes importantes pour former, attirer et fidéliser plus de professionnels de la santé. Ces investissements ont produit des résultats concrets pour les Manitobains et Manitobaines.

***Translation***

*The Province has made significant investments to train, retain and attract more health care professionals and these investments have delivered real results for Manitobans.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, today there are 235 more doctors working in Manitoba than in 1999. In 2007 alone, Manitoba gained 54 doctors, the highest annual increase on record.

There are 86 more doctors practising in rural Manitoba and 103 more specialists in the province than in 1999.

Today’s budget invests $7.2 million in new resources to:

·         expand the medical school to 110 training seats;

·         increase specialty training, especially for emergency medicine; and

·         increase support for the International Medical Graduate program.

Mr. Speaker, there are now 1,789 more nurses practicing in Manitoba than in '99. Of these, 265 northern and rural positions have been filled through incentives that encourage new nursing graduates to practice in rural and northern Manitoba.

Budget '08 moves us closer to our goal of hiring 700 more nurses with new funding to expand nursing training, including 40 more seats. With this increase, Manitoba is training almost three times more nurses annually than in 1999. According to the independent Manitoba Nursing Research Institute, more than 90 percent of nursing grads stay and work in Manitoba.

Budget '08 invests $1.2 million to fund additional nurse practitioner positions. Today’s budget also provides funding to create a first-of-its-kind graduate program to train twelve new physician assistants over the next two years.

Over the next four years, the Province will implement a comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of care in Manitoba’s personal care homes. Budget '08 provides $3 million to begin hiring additional nurses, health-care aides and allied health-care workers.

Our government has acted to address concerns with wait times and our policies are delivering results:

·         Manitoba leads the nation with a one-week wait for radiation therapy, down from six weeks in the '90s;

·         The wait time for MRIs has been cut to seven weeks, down from 28;

·         CT wait times have been cut to six weeks, down from 18;

·         Wait times for hip and knee replacements have been cut to 18 weeks, down from 44 weeks.

We are also providing Regional Health Authorities with new funds for a range of programs, including:

·         $2 million for provincial labs and rural diagnostic imaging;

·         $2.9 million for control of sexually transmitted infections and HIV;

·         $2.3 million for chronic disease prevention initiatives; and

·         $1.8 million for mental health programs.

We will invest more than $20 million to develop a new Western Manitoba regional cancer centre in Brandon. Budget '08 also provides an additional $1.8 million for cancer screening to ensure earlier diagnosis and treatment.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 moves forward with $2.4 million to expand the availability of dialysis at locations across the province including Berens River, Gimli, and the Percy Moore Hospital serving Hodgson and Peguis.

We have committed $40 million to redevelop the Women’s Hospital at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg, creating a new centre of excellence for women’s health services.

      De plus, on a commencé à planifier le réaménagement de la maternité de l’Hôpital Saint-Boniface et la création du centre de naissance du secteur sud.

 ***Translation***

*Planning is also under way to redevelop the maternity ward at St. Boniface Hospital and create a new South End Birthing Centre.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, our government has invested more than $1 billion to improve facilities and equipment since '99. We have modernized and expanded more than 90 health-care facilities across the province. There are now new or renovated hospitals in Winnipeg, Brandon, Swan River, Thompson, The Pas, Pinawa, Gimli, Ste. Anne, and Steinbach. The $135-million Health Sciences Centre redevelopment is the largest health facility redevelopment in the history of the province.

In the last year alone, projects totalling more than $45 million were completed.

The work is continuing with:

·         construction of a 100-bed personal care home in Neepawa;

·         redevelopment of the surgical areas of the Ste. Anne Hospital.

One of our priorities has been to modernize outdated and aging facilities in Manitoba. Nowhere was this need greater than the Selkirk Mental Health Centre. I am pleased to announce that the redevelopment is well under way with completion expected later this year. Today’s budget provides new resources for additional front-line staff for the centre. These improvements will make a real difference in the lives of those who rely on its services.

Better and faster emergency care is the goal of our investments to upgrade emergency rooms at hospitals around the province including St. Anthony’s Hospital in The Pas and Seven Oaks, Concordia, and Victoria hospitals in Winnipeg.

Construction will begin this year on the $5‑ million redevelopment of the emergency department of the Portage General Hospital. Next year, the $4.5-million renovation of the emergency department at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach is scheduled to start.

We have been listening to what doctors and nurses are telling us about emergency rooms, and we are taking action. We have provided funding to more than double the number of training spots for emergency medicine. Building on this, Budget '08 provides another $1 million in new resources to relieve the pressures on emergency rooms.

Pharmacare is another important way that we maintain affordability for Manitobans by helping to pay part of the medication costs for Manitobans in medical and financial need. Pharmacare is not a part of the Canadian medicare system. It is a co-insurance program in which the patient buying the prescription pays part of the cost and the provincial government pays the rest.

According to the Canadian Institute of Health Information, Manitoba provides the best drug coverage in Canada, paying 54 percent of prescription drug expenditures for Manitobans. We have adopted best practices and expanded the use of generic drugs to control costs. Nonetheless, the cost of this important program continues to grow.

Since '99, we have added almost 2,000 new drugs to Pharmacare and the average benefit paid has more than doubled. In Budget '08, Pharmacare costs are projected to rise to $284 million and Pharmacare deductibles will increase by 5 percent to help offset rising costs. This will mean an increase of between $2 and $6 per month on average for most Pharmacare families.

      Le système de soins de santé joue un rôle important dans le maintien de la santé, mais tout le monde sait que de saines habitudes de vie peuvent contribuer de manière importante à la santé et à la qualité de vie.

***Translation***

*The health care system plays an important role in maintaining our health, but we all know that healthy living can contribute significantly to our health and our quality of life.*

***English***

Our government was the first in Canada to create a ministry dedicated to healthy living, health promotion and disease prevention.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 provides new resources to expand our investment in healthy living, including:

·         $500,000 for recreation directors to expand recreation opportunities for youth in inner-city and other Neighbourhoods Alive Communities;

·         $2.1 million in public school funding to support physical education in grades 11 and 12;

·         a new First Sports initiative to help more young people in rural and northern Manitoba participate in sports with funding to purchase the equipment they need; and

·         support for projects like the Southdale Community Centre as part of our $60 million, multi-year commitment to fund recreation projects across the province.

We have made a strong commitment to break the chains of addiction and improve mental health services by investing more than $40 million over the past two years in addictions programming and capital. A new addictions treatment centre is under construction in Thompson and planning is under way to develop a mental health emergency room in Winnipeg, the first of its kind in Canada.

**Healthy Families**

Supporting families and building communities remains a key priority for our government. There are positive changes happening. Between '99 and 2005 there was a 25 percent reduction in Manitoba’s child poverty rate and the number of single female parents living on low incomes has declined by over 40 percent.

In addition, the number of people on Employment and Income Assistance continues to decline and is at a 20-year low with 11,000 fewer individuals on the program than in 1999.

We will continue to do more to fight poverty and inequality. Mr. Speaker, today’s budget brings to over $70 million the amount that our government is investing annually to improve benefits and services for people on welfare and to help them transition to employment.

Budget '08 moves forward with our Rewarding Work strategy to enhance opportunities for education and training, expanding employment, and making it easier to work and succeed.

In 2007, our government announced a $188 million multi-year housing strategy to improve access to safe and affordable housing for all Manitobans.

Budget '08 provides an additional $16.6 million for Manitoba’s HOMEWorks! initiative, including added funding for new projects under the Een Dah Aung (My Home) program for Aboriginal off-reserve housing.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that today’s budget directs $3.5 million to extend the Manitoba Shelter Benefit to help more people in need, including:

·         extending benefits to eligible single adults and couples without children receiving income assistance;

·         increasing support for individuals and families not on income assistance;

·         implementing a pilot project that provides a portable benefit for individuals with mental health challenges; and

·         creating a new transitional shelter benefit for eligible non-disabled single individuals and childless couples who leave welfare for work.

Budget '08 demonstrates our continued commitment to community living for persons with mental disabilities. Mr. Speaker, today’s budget increases funding for the Supported Living Program by $12.4 million.

**Healthy Children**

Healthy Child Manitoba co-ordinates the establishment of a province-wide network of programs to give kids a better start in life, including prenatal and early childhood development programs, healthy schools initiatives, and strategies for healthy adolescence.

      Les services de garde d’enfants sont d’une importance vitale pour les familles du Manitoba.

***Translation***

*Child care is vitally important to Manitoba families.*

***English***

Our government has funded approximately 7,000 more child care spaces since 1999. New investments have improved training and salaries for existing staff and helped train more early childhood educators.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08 adds another $5 million in new funding to improve access to quality child care in Manitoba, bringing the total increase in child care funding since 1999 to more than $60 million. This will ensure more children benefit from licensed child care by:

·         funding more spaces, including additional nursery school spaces;

·         establishing a new training and recruitment fund; and

·         following through on our commitment to increase salaries for early childhood educators.

Details of our longer term plan for child care will be announced by the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh).

In the fall of '06, our government began an overhaul of the child welfare system, committing more than $48 million under Changes for Children to implement the recommendations of reviews undertaken by independent officers of the Legislature. We have taken action on the recommendations, including:

·         hiring 90 new staff toward our commitment to add 150 new positions;

·         increasing rates for foster parents by 23 percent;

·         recruiting 900 new foster home beds; and

·         focusing more on prevention and early intervention.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08 provides $23.1 million to continue making the changes needed to better protect the interests of Manitoba's children.

Our strategy to prevent child sexual exploitation was officially launched in '02. Since then, new initiatives have been implemented in partnership with community organizations including:

·         the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre safe home;

·         Ndinawe’s child and youth care worker training program; and

·         Ka Ni Kanichihk’s specialized foster care program.

Today’s budget provides resources to support the next steps in protecting Manitobans of all ages from sexual exploitation.

Budget '08 provides new resources to help young adults affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder to access opportunities like housing, education, recreation, crisis services, family connections and mentoring.

**Arts and Culture**

Arts and culture remain an integral part of the Manitoba way of life and the economy. Our government actively supports culture and the arts with the second highest level of per capita funding in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that Budget '08 provides new resources to support library development, including:

·         more libraries, including several in First Nations communities;

·         an annual rural and northern technology grant program; and

·         a one-time grant to the Winnipeg Public Library for collection and technology upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, our government was proud to support the vision for a new Canadian Museum of Human Rights with our commitment of $40 million. This museum will make it possible for Manitobans, Canadians and international visitors to gain a deeper understanding of human rights issues world wide.

This world-class museum is the result of a concentrated and sustained effort by the community that brought together all the sectors of the government and of the community and of the voluntary sector to pledge a total of $265 million for its construction.

Our government is also supporting the community-led effort to preserve the historic site of Upper Fort Garry. We have pledged capital support and will designate the land a provincial park, providing funding for annual maintenance of the site in perpetuity.

      Cette année verra aussi le début des travaux de construction d’un nouveau théâtre pour Le Cercle Molière. Nous aurons le plaisir de travailler en partenariat avec la communauté pour faire un nouveau centre pour cette compagnie théâtrale historique une réalité.

 ***Translation***

*This year, construction will begin on a new theatre for Le Cercle Molière. We are looking forward to working in partnership with the community to help bring their vision for a new home for this historic theatre company into being.*

***English***

Our government is also taking part in the new tourism promotion strategy called the Road to 2010. This strategy will include new promotional campaigns to capitalize on the excitement generated by the 2010 Vancouver Olympics to showcase Manitoba on the world stage.

Improvements are continuing in our provincial parks. In the last four years, we have upgraded 544 campsites in 20 campgrounds and added 84 new campsites and 40 new yurts and family vacation cabins.

Budget '08 will continue our parks improvement with:

·         more campground site upgrades;

·         more new electrical campsites; and

·         additional yurts and cabins.

**Safer Communities**

Manitobans want to feel safe in their communities and they expect there will be appropriate consequences for acts of violence and organized crime.

Manitoba has pressed the federal government to make needed changes to the federal Criminal Code and Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Our government has worked to increase police officers throughout Manitoba. Since '99, 155 police positions have been added throughout Manitoba and we have committed to add another 100 during this mandate.

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget commits resources for 20 positions, including 10 for Winnipeg and two for Brandon. We will continue to work with the RCMP to increase their presence in the province. The recent federal announcement will help make further improvements in coming years.

Budget '08 also provides funding for:

·         a new Mediation Services pilot project;

·         two additional Crown prosecutors; and

·         additional staff for the upgraded Milner Ridge Correctional Centre.

Well-targeted crime reduction strategies that balance enforcement and prevention do make a difference. Mr. Speaker, thanks to the work of the Auto Theft Task Force, auto thefts in Winnipeg in the first three months of '08 are down 46 percent.

Our budget has invested in prevention strategies that focus on helping youth at risk make more positive choices in their lives.

We have committed more than $40 million through Neighbourhoods Alive! to support community driven neighbourhood revitalization projects, including crime reduction and public safety. Budget '08 provides new resources for this successful program.

This year, we will also see the expansion of the Lighthouses program to provide five additional locations where young people can take part in sports, art, music, and other activities.

**Rural Manitoba**

Rural Manitoba is sharing Manitoba’s healthy growth. Over the last 10 years, there have been positive population increases in our rural areas. Three out of 10 immigrants arriving through the Provincial Nominee Program are settling in rural Manitoba.

      La Province offre un soutien de taille pour aider les municipalités à grandir.

***Translation***

*Manitoba provides strong support to help municipalities grow.*

***English***

The most recent data show that Manitoba is the province which provides the highest per capita level of unconditional grants to municipalities.

Through the Building Manitoba Fund, municipalities receive a share of provincial income, corporate, and fuel taxes: revenues that grow with the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this year the Building Manitoba Fund will provide municipalities outside Winnipeg with a 6 percent increase over '07.

Community Places provides funding and planning assistance to non-profit community organizations to build, upgrade or upgrade facilities that benefit their local communities. Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 adds another million to this valuable program.

      Au cours de 2007, nous avons formé un partenariat avec la collectivité de Notre‑Dame‑de‑Lourdes afin d’appuyer l’ouverture du Centre Albert-Galliot, qui s’est révélée un grand succès.

***Translation***

*During 2007, we partnered with the community of Notre Dame de Lourdes to support the successful opening of Centre Albert-Galliot*

***English***

Agriculture is a key contributor to Manitoba’s healthy economic performance.

Our government is supporting new opportunities for the rural economy with the development of bio-based products and processes. Biofuels like ethanol, biodiesel and biomass will provide new revenue streams for Manitoba producers.

We are helping to develop foods for the future through investments in the Food Development Centre, the Richardson Centre for Functional Foods and Nutraceuticals, and the Canadian Centre for Agri-Food Research in Health and Medicine.

Our government remains committed to farm programs that help ease the effects of unpredictable weather and markets. Over the five years from 2003 to 2007, Manitoba contributed almost $450 million to stabilization programs.

The livestock industry in Manitoba and across Canada has been under significant pressure due to soaring feed costs, low livestock prices and the impacts of a high Canadian dollar. Our government is committed to ensuring Manitoba producers receive support to maintain their farm businesses today and position the sector for future profitability.

Manitoba, with funding from the federal government’s new Community Development Trust, is investing $14.7 million to support producers of cattle and other ruminant livestock. This is in addition to our government’s adjustments to BSE recovery loans to improve cash flow for cattle producers.

For hog producers, our government made $60 million in loan support available at favourable interest rates. In March 2008, we built on our commitment to protect our water resources while supporting value-added processing and vital jobs in Brandon and Neepawa. Through the Community Development Trust, we are supporting economic and environmental sustainability and building additional capacity that will help protect the industry against future trade action.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 provides the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation with an increase of $8.8 million to reflect rising crop values, which have brought the total amount of protection offered by production insurance to $1.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget also invests in the safety and security of the food supply through new investments in inspection services, veterinarian training and services and we are working on development of agri-food traceability processes to address both the safety and environmental needs here at home and the stringent requirements for international trade.

**Northern Manitoba**

The University College of the North is an innovative institution that educates people in their own communities and contributes to the next generation of northern nurses, teachers, and tradespeople. Through its two main campuses at The Pas and Thompson and 12 regional centres, it serves more than 2,000 students annually.

The Northern Healthy Foods Initiative promotes the production and availability of healthy, affordable food in northern and remote Manitoba communities. Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 builds on the success of this innovative program with new resources to expand into more communities.

Budget '08 provides an additional $1.1 million for fire suppression, including an additional helicopter and the introduction of disability insurance for volunteer firefighters in Aboriginal and Northern Affairs communities.

**Aboriginal Economic Development**

The settlement of long-standing land claims is an important step in clearing the way for economic growth in Aboriginal communities. Mr. Speaker, with today’s budget we are dedicating additional resources to speed up the overall process.

This year marked the first celebration of Manitoba’s new February holiday, Louis Riel Day.

      Nous partageons la fierté des Métis en reconnaissant Louis Riel comme le principal artisan de la création du Manitoba en tant que cinquième province du Canada.

***Translation***

*We share the pride of the Métis people in recognizing Riel as the driving force to make Manitoba Canada's fifth province.*

***English***

Our government is working with the Manitoba Métis Federation on an economic development strategy and other initiatives to benefit the Métis people in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 provides $250,000 as the first of four annual contributions to a $1-million Capital Improvements Fund for Friendship Centres across the province.

We have started work on the all-weather road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg from Provincial Road 304 near Hollow Water to Bloodvein with the replacement of two bridges. Engineering work is continuing and planning for route selection beyond Bloodvein is underway.

The east side communities are also benefiting from new sustainable economic development and training opportunities, including:

·         funding for the redevelopment of land use and resource management plans;

·         establishment of the East Side Aboriginal Sustainable Tourism organization;

·         the Island Lake First Nations Energy Efficiency and Housing Retrofit pilot project; and

·         a 25-seat LPN training program for nurses at St. Theresa Point.

Our government continues to work with First Nations communities in the bid for a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for 42,000 square kilometres of the southern boreal forest on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Gaining international recognition for this globally significant boreal forest will maintain the ecological health of the land while providing the people who live there with opportunities for sustainable economic development.

**Urban Centres**

Budget '08 provides significantly increased funding for Winnipeg, Brandon and other municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008 the City of Winnipeg will receive more than $200 million in funding to support services to citizens, including more road improvements, affordable and accessible transit services, and public safety. Since 1999, provincial funding for the City of Winnipeg has grown by 57 percent.

In 2008, we are providing $29 million for road improvements, an increase of $8 million over '07, towards our commitment to invest $125 million in new funding for Winnipeg’s transportation infrastructure. Manitoba is also providing one-third of the funding for upgrading Winnipeg’s waste-water plants, an investment of $235 million.

For the second year in a row, Manitoba is funding 50 percent of transit costs. This is only the second time this has been done in the last 15 years.

This year, Manitoba will receive $17.9 million through the federal transit trust. We will work with Winnipeg to develop projects that will increase ridership, provide alternative active transportation options, including bicycle paths, and make progress towards its Rapid Transit Implementation Plan.

      Les signes du progrès sont partout.

***Translation***

*The signs of progress are everywhere.*

***English***

The Keystone Centre’s Agricultural Centre of Excellence has opened its doors to the world, Assiniboine Community College’s Culinary Arts program has moved to its new home in the former Nurses Residence and we expect the construction of the state-of-the-art Culinary Theatre to be completed by September '08. We are also working towards finalizing an agreement for the construction of a trades facility as phase 2 of the Assiniboine Community College relocation.

There are two strong proposals for new fitness facilities in Brandon and we will continue to work with the city and federal government to help both these projects move ahead.

We should start soon on a $7-million reconstruction of the Westman Regional labs, building on previous investments including the Health Studies Building at Brandon University and the redevelopment of the Brandon Regional Health Centre, a $58-million capital commitment.

Brandon has taken a significant step in redeveloping its downtown core. Today’s budget will provide resources for Renaissance Brandon to match the contributions from the City of Brandon.

Manitoba is also proceeding with major infrastructure upgrades for Brandon, including the 18th Street Bridge and the Eastern Access Route extension.

**Fiscal Plan**

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 is a balanced budget fully reflecting Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. It builds on the achievements of the past eight budgets including:

·         balancing the budget every single year;

·         making the largest in debt and pension payments in Manitoba history;

·         funding the government’s full share of employee pensions for the first time in more than 40 years;

·         we have also reduced the Province’s net debt to GDP ratio and lowered debt servicing costs; and

·         saved wisely for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 is balanced, with a projected summary surplus of $96 million. The budget’s core options are also fully supported with core government revenues, including funding prepaid by the federal government for joint federal-provincial priorities, exceeding core government expenditures. This means our government has balanced the budget for nine consecutive years.

We will complete the transition to summary budgeting and reporting by updating balanced budget legislation based on advice of the Deloitte review. Our budget outlook projects continued balanced budgets into the future.

Overall, Budget '08 provides for a 3.3 percent growth in core expenditures as well as on a summary basis and a $110-million payment on our general purpose debt and pension liabilities. This brings our total debt and pension payments to $924 million over nine years, the largest such payment in Manitoba’s history.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the progress we have made addressing the Province’s debt, particularly the unfunded pension liabilities. The liability had grown to $2.7 billion by '99. Left unchecked, it was projected to reach $8.89 billion by 2028.

Rather than let the pension liability continue to grow unchecked, we started the first-ever plan to eliminate the pension liability without increasing the Province’s net debt burden.

We started making current service contributions again, starting with the contributions for new employees. Building on this, in '07-08 we funded 75 percent of the unfunded liability of the Teachers’ Retirement Allowances Fund, strengthening the pension plan and generating long-term savings to the Province.

Budget '08 continues to address the unfunded pension liability by committing to begin funding the Civil Service Superannuation Fund. Mr. Speaker, with today’s budget, I can say that Manitoba is now funding its full share of current service pension contributions for all employees.

Since our government took office, Manitoba’s net debt to GDP ratio has been reduced by more than 30 percent, from 31.4 percent in '99, to an estimated 21.7 percent in '08-09. We are planning for continued reductions in Manitoba’s net debt to GDP ratio over the medium term.

We have also reduced the cost of the debt to taxpayers, with servicing costs just 6.5 cents on the dollar, down more than 50 percent from 13.2 cents in 1999.

We have also prudently saved for the future. The Fiscal Stabilization Fund has grown from $265 million to a projected balance of $683 million at the end of '07-08. It will continue to be available to support the core operations of government.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has earned six credit rating improvements since '99 and Budget '08 follows the same sound fiscal approach that has proven successful for the past eight years.

**Keeping Manitoba Affordable**

Since '99, our government has delivered the largest personal and business tax in Manitoba history.

We have provided this unprecedented tax relief while balancing every budget, paying down the debt and pension liability, and investing in vital programs and services.

      Cette approche équilibrée de l’allègement fiscal s’inscrit dans le contexte de notre engagement à conserver au Manitoba un coût de la vie abordable pour les familles et pour les entreprises.

***Translation***

*This balanced approach to tax relief is part of our commitment to keep Manitoba affordable for families and for businesses.*

***English***

      Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 moves forward with new tax reductions that will save Manitobans and businesses $182 million annually. Added to the measures announced in previous budgets that take effect this year and next, taxpayers will have $292 million in new annual savings by 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that today’s budget increases the Education Property Tax Credit by another $75 to $600 in 2008, saving Manitobans an additional $24.5 million annually. Since '99, the credit has increased by $350.

This year’s school funding includes a $16‑million Tax Incentive Grant to help school districts freeze taxes. In Winnipeg School Division, Manitoba’s largest, the freeze saves a homeowner with a $125,000 home more than $25. Combined with the $75 tax credit increase, these tax savings are more than $100 this year.

The Farmland School Tax Rebate increases to 70 percent in '08, up from 65 per cent in '07. It will return over $30 million to Manitoba farmers in '08 as a rebate on school taxes paid.

These measures are part of a comprehensive action plan that, taken together, will save Manitobans $250 million in education property taxes in 2008.

Mr. Speaker, reducing education property taxes each and every year is paying dividends. Since '99, the education taxes on a home assessed at $125,000 have been reduced by an average of 22 percent, compared to an average increase of 60 percent during the 1990s.

Mr. Speaker, great progress has been made in making education property taxes more affordable in Manitoba. We will continue this effort as we move toward funding 80 percent of the total cost of public education.

We are moving forward on our multi-year plan for improving personal tax brackets and rates. Effective January 1, '09, we will:

·         reduce the tax rate for the lowest income bracket to 10.8 percent;

·         raise the threshold for the middle income bracket to $31,000; and

·         raise the threshold for the top bracket to $67,000.

Budget '08 provides additional personal tax reductions by:

·         adding $100 to the Basic Personal Amount for '09, bringing the total increase in this amount to $1,340 since 1999; and

·         adding $100 to the Spousal and Dependent Amounts.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to report that an additional 2,100 low-income Manitobans will be removed from the tax rolls as a result of these new measures.

Today’s budget also increases the basic amount of the Personal Tax Credit to $195 for '09, benefitting over 281,000 households.

We are proud that Manitoba has the best home care system in the country, serving some 39,000 Manitobans annually. Informal caregivers play a vital role in helping home care clients remain independent. The majority of these caregivers are women supporting high-needs children or caring for aged parents.

Mr. Speaker, today’s budget follows through on our promise to provide support to those caregivers with a new Primary Caregiver Tax Credit of $85 per month up to $1,020 per year for each person cared for starting in 2009.

Mr. Speaker, with today’s personal income tax reductions, and measures our government has taken in previous years, Manitobans will save $455 million annually in personal income taxes in 2010 and subsequent years.

Since '99, Manitoba businesses have also benefited from a series of tax reductions aimed at keeping our province competitive.

      Nous avons réduit à la fois l’impôt sur le revenu des petites entreprises et l’impôt sur les bénéfices des sociétés.

***Translation***

*Our plan has reduced both small business and corporation income taxes.*

***English***

Budget '08 builds on this progress with another $120 million in general and targeted tax reductions.

Mr. Speaker, Manitoba already has the lowest small-business tax rate in the country. When the small business rate drops to 1 percent in January '09, Manitoba small businesses will save an additional $9.7 million annually. This benefits 80 percent of taxable businesses in Manitoba.

The general corporate income tax rate will drop to 12 percent in July '09. This tax was 17 percent when we took office and our reductions since then are the first in half a century. Our next goal will be to reduce it to 11 percent in future years, subject to balancing the budget.

Capital taxes are often criticized for discouraging the investments needed to build more productive and competitive businesses. We listened to this advice and committed to phasing out the general corporation capital tax before 2011.

Today I can confirm that we will cut the general corporation capital tax rate to 0.3 percent for the next fiscal year and to 0.2 percent for the year after that. After December 31, 2010, the general corporate capital tax will be entirely eliminated.

Mr. Speaker, for manufacturers and processors particularly impacted by the high Canadian dollar, I am pleased to announce that we will:

·         eliminate the corporate capital tax for manufacturers and processors as of July '08, freeing up about $25 million annually to invest in enhancing productivity and competitiveness;

·         extend the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit to the end of 2011, providing added certainty to businesses, and building on the recent increase of the refundable portion of the credit to 70 percent which saves businesses $2.8 million annually.

Today’s budget also extends the Community Enterprise Development Tax Credit.

Mr. Speaker, the Co-operative Education Tax Credit is being expanded and renamed as the Co-op Education and Apprenticeship Tax Credits. This new component will provide an employer who hires a recent graduate from an apprenticeship program with a tax credit of up to $2,500 a year for up to two years for each journeyperson they hire.

Budget '08 also uses strategic tax measures to attract and grow new industries.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we are enhancing the very successful Film and Video Production Tax Credit to maintain our competitive advantage and to continue to build the local film industry.

Based on the success of our film and video tax incentive, Budget '08 adds two new tax credit programs to encourage new growth in emerging industries.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the new Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit. This replaces the New Media Production Grant program and will provide up to $2 million to encourage development of new digital media products through a refundable tax credit equal to 40 percent of eligible Manitoba labour costs.

      L’industrie Manitobaine de l’édition de livres est aussi un secteur dont les possibilités de croissance sont immenses.

***Translation***

*Manitoba's book publishing industry is also a sector with strong growth potential.*

***English***

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that today’s budget introduces a new Book Publishing Tax Credit which will help this industry expand by providing a refundable income tax credit equal to 40 percent of eligible Manitoba labour costs. This tax credit will also encourage environmentally-responsible publishing by offering an additional 10 percent bonus for books printed on forest-friendly paper.

The budget also extends the Riparian Tax Credit and contains a new measure to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and advance our movement towards a carbon-neutral economy.

We are working to reduce the emissions from coal as an energy source. We have addressed the use of coal by Manitoba Hydro, and now we will work with other industries to make the transition from coal to less environmentally damaging fuels.

Mr. Speaker, today I am announcing we will introduce a new emissions tax on the burning of coal: $10 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. We plan to have this tax be revenue neutral. The money raised will be invested to help industries make an economically sustainable transition. To give industry time to adjust, this tax will not take effect until July 2011.

**Conclusion**

Mr. Speaker, the budget 2008 is balanced. It builds on our strong, stable economy and creates opportunities to move forward on Manitobans’ priorities.

Des défis nous attendent, mais le Manitoba est en bonne position pour les relever de front.

***Translation***

*There are challenges ahead of us but Manitoba is well-positioned to meet those challenges.*

***English***

Manitoba’s past eight years of steady growth creates opportunities for our young people, our families and our businesses. Mr. Speaker, Budget '08 positions Manitoba to meet the challenges ahead and grow for the future. I offer it to you today. Thank you.